

JAPAN'S WELL-STRATEGISED SNAP ELECTIONS

LIM Tai Wei

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Executive Summary

1. When Prime Minister (PM) Shinzo Abe called for a snap election, it drew a variety of reactions from stakeholders in the Japanese political system. The media criticised the elections as premature (two years before the full term) and an extravagant use of time and financial resources.
2. To PM Abe, it makes sense given Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) resources, some positive results from Abenomics efforts, a disunited opposition and an unprepared opposition.
3. The initial results of Abenomics show that the first two arrows (expansionary/loose monetary policy and government spending) are waning, while the third arrow of structural reform is needed.
4. The external positive aspect is Japan regaining US confidence in its reliability and reinvigorated Japan as the cornerstone of American power in the Pacific. The alliance is further strengthened by the positive development of the contentious US military base in Okinawa.
5. Abe has also shown the intentions to join the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership and mitigate disadvantages for its domestic sectors while recognising the overall need to be a leading member in this important economic grouping.
6. Symbolically, for the venue of its kick-off, PM Abe selected Fukushima and declared that the recovery of the city is important and symbolic of Japan's own recovery.
7. Alongside Fukushima's recovery, Abe is likely to be occupied with implementing consumption tax increases, avoiding deflation, managing negative effects of lower currency value and creating jobs in the economic aspects.

8. Politically, he is likely to be focusing on the issue of Japan's right to collective self-defence. Nuclear issue will have to contend with these election priorities.
9. Elections results on 14 December 2014 saw LDP taking 290 seats, with Komeito taking 35, adding up to a total of 325 seats. Surprisingly, the Democratic Party of Japan obtained 11 more seats to finish at 73.
10. The United States reacted quickly to the victory as the international media reported that the White House characterised the US-Japan alliance as "the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific".
11. The domestic forces are now aligned in Abe's favour and for him to survive an internal LDP party election in September 2015. The ball is now in Abe's court to tackle the multitude of issues facing him, backed by the mandate he sought.